

Tigre language

Tigre (Tigre: ትግረ *tigre* or ትግሬ *tigrē*), better known in Eritrea by its autonym **Tigrayit** (ትግረይት), and also known by speakers in Sudan as **al-Bani amir** (Arabic: *البنى عامر*), is an Afroasiatic language spoken in the Horn of Africa. It belongs to the North Ethiopic subdivision of the South Semitic languages and is primarily spoken by the Tigre people in Eritrea.^[4] Along with Tigrinya, it is believed to be the most closely related living language to Ge'ez, which is still in use as the liturgical language of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church and Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church. Tigre has lexical similarity, 71% with Ge'ez and 64% with Tigrinya.^[5] As of 1997, Tigre was spoken by approximately 800,000 Tigre people in Eritrea.^[6] The Tigre mainly inhabit western Eritrea, though they also reside in the northern highlands of Eritrea and its extension into the adjacent part of Sudan, as well as Eritrea's Red Sea coast north of Zula.

The Tigre people are not to be confused with their neighbors to the south, the Tigrayans of Eritrea and Ethiopia, who speak Tigrinya. Tigrinya is also derived from the parent Ge'ez tongue, but is quite distinct from Tigre despite the similarity in name.

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Tigre	
ትግረ (Tigre) / ትግሬ (Tigrē) / ትግረይት(Tigrayit)/ ኧሳ (Xasa)^[1]	
Native to	Eritrea
Ethnicity	Tigre
Native speakers	250,000 – 1.05 million (2014) ^[2]
Language family	Afro-Asiatic <ul style="list-style-type: none">Semitic<ul style="list-style-type: none">South Semitic<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ethiopian Semitic<ul style="list-style-type: none">Northern Ethiosemitic<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ge 'ez?<ul style="list-style-type: none">Tigre
Writing system	Tigre alphabet (Ge 'ez script), Arabic script
Official status	
Recognised minority language in	 Eritrea Sudan
Language codes	
ISO 639-2	tig (https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?code_ID=448)
ISO 639-3	tig
Glottolog	tigr1270 (http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/tigr1270) ^[3]

Dialects

There are several dialects of Tigre, some of them are; Mansa’ (Mensa), Habab, Barka (Beni-Amir), Semhar, Algeden, Senhit (Ad-Tekleis, Ad-Temariam, Bet-Juk, Marya Kayah, Maria Tselam) and Dahalik, which is spoken in Dahlak archipelago. Intelligibility between the dialects is above 91% (except Dahalik), where intelligibility between Dahalik and the other dialects is between 24% to 51%.^[7]

Numeral

- 1. ḥate ሐተ or ḥante ሐንተ
- 2. kili'ē ክልኤ
- 3. sel'ās ሰለአስ
- 4. arba'e አርበዕ
- 5. hams ሐምስ
- 6. sie's ስእስ or sus ሱስ
- 7. sebu'ī ሰቡዕ
- 8. seman ሰመን
- 9. si'e ሰዕ
- 10. 'asir ዐስር
- 11. 'asir-hatte ዐስር-ሐተ
- 12. 'asir-kil'e ዐስር-ክልኤ
- ...
- 20. 'isra ዕስረ
- 20. 'isra wo ḥate ዕስረ ወ ሐተ
- 21. 'isra wo kili'ē ዕስረ ወ ክልኤ
- ...
- 30. selasa ሰለሰ
- 31. selasa wo ḥate ሰለሰ ወ ሐተ
- ...
- 40. arba'a አርበዐ
- 41. arba'a wo ḥate አርበዐ ወ ሐተ
- ...
- 50. ḥamsa ሐምስ
- 51. ḥamsa wo ḥate ሐምስ ወ ሐተ
- ...
- 100. mi'et ምእት
- 200. kil'e mi'et ክልኤ ምእት
- 300. seles mi'et ሰለአስ ምእት
- ...
- 1000. alf አልፍ

Phonology

Tigre has preserved the two pharyngeal consonants of Ge'ez. The Ge'ez vowel inventory has almost been preserved except that the two vowels which are phonetically close to [e] and [a] seem to have evolved into a pair of phonemes which have the same quality (the same articulation) but differ in length; [a] vs. [aː]. The original phonemic distinction according to quality survives in Tigrinya. The vowel [e], traditionally named "first order vowel", is most commonly transcribed *ä* in Semitic linguistics.

The phonemes of Tigre are displayed below in both International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbols (indicated by the IPA brackets) and the symbols common (though not universal) among linguists who work on Ethiopian Semitic languages. For the long vowel /aː/, the symbol 'ā' is used per Raz (1983). Three consonants, /p, p', x/, occur only in a small number of loanwords, hence they are written in parentheses.

As in other Ethiopian Semitic languages, the phonemic status of /ə/ is questionable; it may be possible to treat it as an epenthetic vowel that is introduced to break up consonant clusters.

Consonants

		<u>Labial</u>	<u>Dental</u>	<u>Palatal</u>	<u>Velar</u>	<u>Pharyngeal</u>	<u>Glottal</u>
<u>Nasal</u>		m	n				
<u>Stop</u>	<u>voiceless</u>	(p)	t	č [tʃ]	k		ʔ
	<u>voiced</u>	b	d	ǧ [dʒ]	g		
	<u>ejective</u>	(pʼ)	tʼ	čʼ [tʃʼ]	kʼ		
<u>Fricative</u>	<u>voiceless</u>	f	s	š [ʃ]	(x)	ħ	h
	<u>voiced</u>		z	ž [ʒ]		ʕ	
	<u>ejective</u>		sʼ				
<u>Approximant</u>			l	y [j]	w		
<u>Rhotic</u>			r				

Vowels

	<u>Front</u>	<u>Central</u>	<u>Back</u>
<u>Close</u>	i	ə [ɨ]	u
<u>Mid</u>	e		o
<u>Open</u>		a, ā [aː]	

Consonant length

Consonant length is phonemic in Tigre (that is, a pair of words can be distinct by consonant length alone), although there are few such minimal pairs. Some consonants do not occur long; these include the pharyngeal consonants, the glottal consonants, /w/, and /j/. In this language, long consonants arise almost solely by gemination as a morphological process; there are few, if any, long consonants in word roots. Gemination is especially prominent in verb morphology.

Grammar

These notes use the spelling adopted by Camperio (1936 - see bibliography) which seems to approximate to Italian rules.

Nouns are of two genders, masculine and feminine.

- Indefinite article: masculine **uoro ኦሮ** e.g. **uoro ennas ኦሮ እነስ** - a man; feminine **hatte ሐተ** e.g. **hatte sit ሐተ እሲት** - a woman.
- The definite article, "the", when expressed, is **la ለ** e.g. **ለጸሐይ ወ ለወርሕ** - the sun and the moon.

As we might expect from a Semitic language, specifically feminine forms, where they exist, are often formed of an element with **t**:

- masculine: **ኦድግ ādig** - donkey, ass; feminine: **ኦድግሀት edghet** - she-ass;
- masculine: **ክልብ kelb** - dog; feminine: **ክልበት kelbet** - bitch;
- masculine: **ክድመይ kedmay** - serving man; **ክድመይት kadmaiet** - serving-woman;

- masculine: መምበ **mamba** - lord, master; መምበይት **mambait** - lady, mistress.

In a similar way, sound-changes can also mark the difference between singular and plural:

- ነጉስ **negus** - king; **negüs** - kings;
- በሐር' *bahar* - sea; አብሐር **abhur** - seas;
- እሴት' *esit* - woman; አንስ **ans** - women;
- ወለት **welet** - girl; አዋልድ **āwalid** - girls;
- መሆር **mehor** - foal, colt; አምሁር **amhur** - foals, colts;
- ነቢ **nebi** - prophet; ነቢያት **nabiat** - prophets;
- በገዐት **bege'āt** - one sheep; አበግዕ **ābagi** - sheep, plural;
- አርዌ **arwē** - Snake; አረዊት **ārewit** - snakes, plural;
- ሐግ **hog** - foot; ሐጎች **hanag** - feet; plural
- እገር **eger** - foot; እገራት **ā'igar** feet; plural
- አዘን **ezen** - ear; አዘኖች **ésenz** - ears;
- ሰዐት **saat** - hour; ሰዓታት **saatat** - hours;
- አንፍ **ānif** - nose; አንፍታት **ānfotat** - noses;
- ህዳይ **hdai** - wedding; ህዳያት **hdayat** - weddings;
- አብ **ab** - father; አበው **abew** - fathers;
- እም **em** - mother; እመወት **emewat** - mothers;
- ኮኮብ **kokob** - star; ከዋክብ **kewakeb** - stars;
- ጓነ **gāne** - foreigner; ጓነታት **ganōtat** - foreigners;
- ረእስ **rass** - head; አርእስ **ares** - heads;
- ጸፍር **ts'efir** - paw, hoof; አጸፍር **atsfar** - claws, hooves;
- ከብድ **kaböd** - belly; አክቡድ **acbud** - bellies.
- ልበስ **läbas**- ልበሶች **läbasat** clothes

Personal pronouns distinguish "you, masculine" and "you, feminine" in both singular and plural:

- እነ **ana** - I, me
- እንታ **enta** - you, singular, masculine
- እንቲ **enti** - you, singular, feminine
- ህቱ **hötu** - he, him, it (masc.)
- ህታ **höti** - she, her, it (fem.)
- ሕነ **hénna** - we, us
- እንቱም **öntu** - you, plural, masculine
- እንትን **öntön** - you, plural, feminine
- ህቶም **hötom** - they, them, masculine
- ህተን **höten** - they, them, feminine

The possessive pronouns appear (a) suffixed to the noun, (b) as separate words:

- my - (a) **-ié** ? example: **chitabié** ክታብዮ- my book; (b) **nai** ናየ with masculine nouns; **naie** ናየ with feminine nouns;

- your (sing. mas. & fem.) - (a) **-cá** ካ example: **chitabcá** ክታብካ- your book; (b) with masc. **naica** ናይካ, with fem. **naichi** ናይካ;
- his - (a) **-ù** ቡ example **chitabù** ክታቡ- his book; (b) with masc. **naiu** ናይ, with fem. **naiua** ናይ;
- our - (a) **-na** ና example **chitabna** ክታብና - her book; (b) with masc. **naina** ናይና , with fem. **naina** ናይና;
- your (pl. masc. & fem.) - (a) **-cum** ኩም (a) **-cin** ክን example **chitabcum** ክታብኩም/ክታብክን- your book; (b) with masc. **naicum** ናይኩም , with fem. **naicün** ናይክን;
- their - **-om** ቦም example **chitabom** ክታቦም- their book; (b) with masc. **naium** ናዮም with fem. **naiön** ናዮን.

The verb "to be":

- **ana halleco (o) tu** - እና ሀለኮ I am; negative: **ihalleco** አሀለኮ- I'm not;
- **enta halleco (o) tu** - እንታ ህሌካ you (sing. masc.) are; neg. **ihalleco** አሀለኮ- you're not;
- **enti hallechi tu** - እንቲ ሀሌኪ you (sing. fem.) are; neg. **ihalleco** አሀለኮ;
- **hötu halla tu** ህቲ ሀላ- he is; neg. **ihalla** አሀላ;
- **höta hallet tu** ህታ ሀሌት - she is; neg. **ihallet** አሀሌት;
- **henna hallena tu** ሐና ሀሌና - we are; neg. **ihallena** አሀሌና;
- **entum hallecum tu** እንቱም ሀሌኩም- you (pl. masc.) are; neg. **ihallecum** አሀሌኩም;
- **entim hallechen tu** እንትን ሀሌክን- you (pl. fem.) are; neg. **ihallecum** አሀሌክን;
- **hötön hallaa tom** ህተን ሀሌያ- they (masc.) are; neg. **ihallao** አሀሌያ;
- **hötön halleia ten** ህተን ሀሌያ - they (fem.) are; neg. **ihallao** አሀሌያ.

The verb "to be", past tense:

- **...alco** ዐልኮ- I was; negative: **ialco** አዐልኮ- I wasn't;
- **...alca** ዐልካ- you (sing. masc.) were; neg. **ialca** አዐልካ;
- **...alchi** ዐልኪ- you (sing. fem.) were; neg. **ialca** አዐልኪ;
- **...ala** ዐላ- he was; neg. **iala** አዐላ;
- **...alet** ዐላት- she was; neg. **iallet** አዐላት;
- **...alna** ዐልና- we were; neg. **ialna** አዐልና;
- **...alcum** ዐልኩም- you (pl. masc.) were; neg. **ialcum** አዐልኩም;
- **...alchen** ዐልክን- you (pl. fem.) were; neg. **ialcum** አዐልክን;
- **...alou** ዐለው- they (masc.) were; neg. **ialou** አዐለው;
- **...alaia** ዐለያ- they (fem.) were; neg. **ialeia** አዐለያ.

The verb "to have":

- **Uoro chitab bi-e ዎሮ ኪታብ ብየ** - I have a book
- **Uoro chitab bö-ca ዎሮ ክታብ ብካ**- You (sing. masc.) have a book,

and so on, with the last word in each case:

- **...be-chi** ብኪ - you (sing. fem.), etc.
- **...bu** ቡ - he...
- **...ba** ቦ - she...
- **...be-na** ብና- we...
- **...be-cum** ብኩም- you (pl. masc.)...

- ...**be-chin** ብክን- you (pl.fem.) ...
- ...**bom** ቦም- they (masc.)...
- ...**ben** በን- they (fem.)...

The verb "to have": past tense, using a feminine noun as an example:

- **Hatte bēt álet-ilu** ሐተ ቤት ዐልት ስሉ - He had a house
- **Hatte bēt álet-ilka** ሐተ ቤት ዐልት ስልካ- You (sing. masc.) you had a house,

and so on, with the last word in each case:

- ...**el-ki** ስልኪ - you (sing. fem.) had a house,
- ...**álet-ollu** ዐለት ስሉ- he had, etc.
- ...**el-la** ዐለት ስላ- she had...
- ...**ilna** ዐለት ስልና- we had...
- ...**elkum** ዐለት ስልኩም- you pl. masc.) had ...
- ...**el-k-n** ዐለት ስልክን- you (pl. fem.) had ...
- ...**el-om** ዐለት ስሎም- they (masc.) had ...
- ...**el-len** ዐለት ስላን- they (fem.) had ...

Sample

- *ሐዖት እት ልርእው፣ እብ አሰሩ ሐዙው* When they see a lion, they seek it through its tracks.
- *ህኩይ ደራሩ ንኩይ* Lazy's dinner is less
- *ህግዖ ፍደት ምን ገብእ። አዚም ደሀብ ቱ* When speaking is an obligation, silence is golden
- *ምህር ኖርቱ ወቅዌት ጽልመት፣* Knowledge is brightness and ignorance darkness.

Other samples

- ሐል ክም እም ኢትገብእ ወጸሓይ ወርሕ ክም አምዕል
- ለኢልትሐሜ ኢልትሐመድ፣
- ለቤለ ለአሰምዕ ወለዘብጠ ለኢደምዕ፣
- ሐሊብ መ ውላዱ ሔሰዩ፣
- ሐምቅ ሐምቁ ምን ረክብ ዜነት ለኢፈግር፣
- ምስል ብርድ አከይ ፍርድ

Writing system

Since around 1889, the Ge'ez script (Ethiopic script) has been used to write the Tigre language. Tigre speakers formerly used Arabic more widely as a lingua franca.^[8] The Bible has been translated into the Tigre language.^[9]

Ge'ez script

Ge'ez script is an abugida, with each character representing a consonant+vowel combination. Ge'ez and its script are also called Ethiopic. The script has been modified slightly to write Tigre.

Tigre Ge'ez Script

	ä	u	i	a	e	ə	o	wä	wi	wa	we	wə
<i>h</i>	ሀ	ሁ	ሂ	ሃ	ሄ	ህ	ሆ					
<i>l</i>	ለ	ሉ	ሊ	ላ	ሌ	ል	ሎ					
<i>h</i>	ሐ	ሑ	ሒ	ሓ	ሔ	ሕ	ሐ					
<i>m</i>	መ	ሙ	ሚ	ማ	ሜ	ም	ሞ					
<i>r</i>	ረ	ሩ	ሪ	ራ	ሬ	ር	ሮ					
<i>s</i>	ሰ	ሱ	ሲ	ሳ	ሴ	ስ	ሶ					
<i>š</i>	ሸ	ሹ	ሺ	ሻ	ሼ	ሽ	ሾ					
<i>k</i>	ቀ	ቁ	ቂ	ቃ	ቄ	ቅ	ቆ	ቈ	቉	ቊ	ቋ	ቌ
<i>b</i>	በ	ቡ	ቢ	ባ	ቤ	ብ	ቦ					
<i>t</i>	ተ	ቱ	ቲ	ታ	ቼ	ት	ቶ					
<i>č</i>	ቸ	ቹ	ቺ	ቻ	ቼ	ች	ቸ					
<i>ḥ</i>	ኀ	ኁ	ኂ	ኃ	ኄ	ኅ	ኆ	ኈ	኉	ኊ	ኋ	ኌ
<i>n</i>	ነ	ኑ	ኒ	ና	ኔ	ን	ኖ					
<i>’</i>	አ	ኡ	ኢ	ኣ	ኤ	ኦ	ኦ					
<i>k</i>	ከ	ኩ	ኪ	ካ	ኬ	ኸ	ኹ	ኰ	኱	ኲ	ኳ	ኴ
<i>w</i>	ወ	ዐ	ዒ	ዑ	ዔ	ዕ	ዖ					
<i>’</i>	ዐ	ዑ	ዒ	ዓ	ዔ	ዕ	ዖ					
<i>z</i>	ዘ	ዙ	ዚ	ዛ	ዞ	ዠ	ዡ					

ž	ዠ	ዡ	ዢ	ዣ	ዤ	ዥ	ዦ					
y	የ	ዩ	ደ	ደ	ዩ	ደ	ዩ					
d	ደ	ደ	ደ	ደ	ደ	ደ	ደ					
ǵ	ጀ	ጀ	ጀ	ጀ	ጀ	ጀ	ጀ					
g	ገ	ገ	ገ	ገ	ገ	ገ	ገ	ጐ	ጐ	ጐ	ጐ	ጐ
t	ጠ	ጠ	ጠ	ጠ	ጠ	ጠ	ጠ					
č	ጨ	ጨ	ጨ	ጨ	ጨ	ጨ	ጨ					
p	ጸ	ጸ	ጸ	ጸ	ጸ	ጸ	ጸ					
s	ጸ	ጸ	ጸ	ጸ	ጸ	ጸ	ጸ					
f	ፈ	ፈ	ፈ	ፈ	ፈ	ፈ	ፈ					
p	ፐ	ፐ	ፐ	ፐ	ፐ	ፐ	ፐ					
	ä	u	i	a	e	ə	o	wä	wi	wa	we	wə

See also

- Tigre people
- Beni-Amer people

Notes

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